

Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence

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Wokingham Borough Council Ref: 243099

Volume 3: Summary

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on behalf of

Dandra and Elstree Land

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Introduction of the Witness

Qualifications

- 1.1 I am Clare Brockhurst, Director of Leyton Place Limited. I have had a career in landscape architecture and landscape planning spanning more than 35 years. Within my technical area of expertise, I specialise in landscape and visual planning matters and the design of strategic Green Infrastructure (GI).
- 1.2 I have a BSc (Hons) degree in Landscape Management from the University of Reading, and a postgraduate diploma in Landscape Architecture from the University of Central England.
- 1.3 I completed and passed my professional practice examinations and became a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI) in 1997. In 2007, I was invited to apply for, and was awarded, Fellowship of the LI (FLI) in recognition of my contribution to the profession in the field of landscape planning.
- 1.4 I have worked for a house builder before commencing my career in private practice, this has informed my understanding of the house building process.
- 1.5 During my career with Waterman CPM, I was the lead landscape witness for the Countryside Agency at the year-long inquiry into the designation of the South Downs National Park (SDNP). In respect of this project, I gained extensive knowledge of protected landscapes, landscape characterisation and the process of assessing valued landscapes.
- 1.6 I set up Leyton Place Limited after I sold my ownership in Tyler Grange LLP, where I was a founding partner. I continue to focus on delivering landscape planning consultancy services to clients, in particular as an expert witness.
- 1.7 In the last 35 years I have prepared numerous LVIA's and LVAs, I have extensive knowledge and experience of direct relevance to this project.
- 1.8 In addition to the yearlong SDNP inquiry, I have been called as an expert witness on more than a hundred occasions, including giving evidence on behalf of developers, private clients, district councils, and local community groups.

Instruction

- 1.9 I was approached by the Appellant in June 2025 to consider Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) reasons for refusal (Decision Notice, **CD 3.01**), the landscape officer's consultation response (**CD 2.22**), the Officer's Report to committee (**CD 3.02**) and review the LVA, (**CD 1.12**). The Appellant asked whether I could provide expert evidence for an appeal in support of the Appellant's case against the Council's Decision Notice.
- 1.10 Having reviewed the submitted material, completed a preliminary desktop study, and visited the Appeal Site, I concluded that I could appear on behalf of the Appellant. I consider the appeal proposals to be an acceptable form of development in relation to landscape and visual environment.
- 1.11 I come to this appeal with 'fresh eyes' and bringing different experience, so the evidence in my proof is based on my extensive professional judgment and informed opinions. My Proof of Evidence is

primarily focussed on the allegations contained in the Council's Decision Notice to be considered in the determination of the appeal, and analysis of the matters pertaining to the allegations made by the Council against the proposal.

1.12 My Proof of Evidence is contained within Volume 1 and is structured as follows:

Volume 1: Text

Section 1:	Introduction
Section 2:	Settlement and Landscape Character - Baseline Situation
Section 3:	The proposals – an overview of the scheme from a landscape and visual perspective
Section 4:	Matters in dispute – providing the explanation as to which issues are addressed in my evidence.
Section 5 :	Likely Landscape and Visual Effects
Section 6:	Analysis of the Council's propositions
Section 7:	Summary and conclusions

Volume 2: Plans and Appendices

Declaration

1.13 The evidence I have prepared represents my informed professional opinion on the objective and subjective aspects of the development for the Appeal Site. Based on my knowledge, the facts stated in this evidence are true and accurate and I have complied with my professional Code of Conduct.

Summary of Conclusions

- 1.14 The detailed analysis and consideration of the issues relating to the landscape and visual effects and relevance in the determination of the appeal is set out in Sections 1 to 6 in Volume 1. This analysis has enabled me to reach the following conclusions.
- 1.15 Development of the Appeal Site will avoid change occurring in respect of any protected, valued and important landscapes at both a national, borough and local scale.
- 1.16 In respect of the natural environment, as a point of fact, the site is not covered by specific policies listed in the NPPF, paragraph 11, footnote 7:
- 1.17 It is not an NPPF Valued Landscape, nor is it in an area considered to be of value in the council's emerging Valued Landscapes evidence base, as confirmed in the Landscape Officer's consultation response.
- 1.18 Landscape and visual impacts beyond the immediate environs of the Appeal Site would be minimal. The character and appearance beyond the limits of the Site will be unchanged.

- 1.19 In respect of the policies cited in the third reason for refusal (**CD 3.01**), specifically, Core Strategy policies CP1 and CP3¹, and MDD Policies CC03 and TB21 having drafted my evidence I make the following points:

CP1 – Sustainable development

- 1.19.1 This high-level policy seeks positive outcomes from development across a number of aspects of the built and natural environment.
- 1.19.2 Pertinent to landscape and visual matters is clause CP1 1) which seeks to “*Maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment*”. As I record in paragraph 4.1 landscape is not a term that applies solely to undeveloped greenfield locations. Landscape includes townscapes and urban environments. Therefore, whilst there will be a change to the landscape within the Site, there will be diversification and an enhancement of the functionality of the existing and new landscape assets.
- 1.19.3 Change is not in and of itself harmful, place creation is an important element when considering this policy.
- 1.19.4 Conclusions on compliance with this policy is not wholly based on consideration of the landscape outcomes.

CP3 – General Principles for development

- 1.19.5 Similarly, this policy is addressing high level concepts associated with the landscape and visual environment.
- 1.19.6 In terms CP 3 a), Ms. Brigid Taylor deals with the appropriateness of the scale, massing etc.
- 1.19.7 With reference to CP3 c) and the need to have no detrimental impact upon important landscape features, as noted above the proposals avoid impacting on important landscapes and landscape assets. The impacts which result from the appeal proposals are localised.
- 1.19.8 Also relevant is CP3 h) and the need to ‘Contribute towards the provision of an appropriate sustainable network of community facilities.’ In this respect the proposals will provide linked natural environments assessable to the existing and new communities.

MDD Policy TB21 – Landscape Character

- 1.19.9 As set out in the DAS (**CD 1.04**), the LVA and my evidence, it is clear that the appeal proposals have taken account of and recognised the character of the landscape (NPPF, para 187 b)), and specifically the elements and qualities of the site.
- 1.19.10 Important features have been identified, in this instance these include the trees, hedgerows, grassland and grain and form of the contemporary settlement edge. There are retained and incorporated/supplemented in the appeal proposals.

¹ In respect of the Decision Notice, Mr. Slatter deals with Core Strategy policy CP11 and MDD Policy C002 as spatial development control policies. The extent of the Development Limits and application of the policy related to policy boundaries regardless of landscape character.

- 1.19.11 Key features have been retained, and new landscape measure will enhance the condition and functionality of the landscape and increase the diversity of landscape assets in a positive manner.

MDD Policy CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping

- 1.20 Reading Road is a Green Route (Policy CC03, 1), this is defined in the glossary to the MDD as:

Roads into settlements that are lined with trees and other vegetation which make a significant contribution to character and environment of the area and contribute to the Borough's network of wildlife corridor.

- 1.21 This definition makes clear that the green routes are re associated with settlements and the settled environment. They are not rural lanes. In the case of the existing green route on Reading Road this includes trees, scrub, and grassland with incidental breaks comprising closed boarded fencing, and breaks in the tree line for access to housing. These features are present on the green route and have not required the route to be classified as a Green Route Enhancement Area – a route which has the potential to be a green route.
- 1.22 Part 2 of the policy sets out that development proposals should demonstrate how they have considered and achieved the listed criteria.
- 1.23 Turning to the listed criteria, CC03 2a, records that development proposals can provide **new** or protect and enhance the Boroughs Green Infrastructure² networks, these networks include a ;large variety of GI assets, including but not limited to green routes (paragraph 2.12, **CD 6.02**).
- 1.24 The Council's allegation that the requirement is to 'protect and enhance' green routes is a misrepresentation of the policy requirements, there is no requirement that green routes are protected and enhanced, they are only one component of the GI network. Table LP3.1 sets out the degree to which the GI functionality is either maintained or enhanced through the delivery of the proposals.
- 1.25 The proposals provide new GI assets through accessible open space, delivering a GI functionality which is not well represented in the landscape. The GI network is protected, primarily through the retention of the boundary features, it will also be enhanced by new landscape planting, ensuring longevity of the network, diversification of the functionality and variety of habitats and land uses.
- 1.26 The green route will be maintained, it will continue to be a road into a settlement, it will be lined with trees, with new tree and shrub planting to enhance this quality of the route and it will continue to be connected to and link with other GI assets ensuring the GI network is protected and enhanced.
- 1.27 In respect of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (NHP) I have the following observations

² Defined in the glossary as "A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities."

POLICY IRS1: PRESERVATION OF SEPARATION OF SETTLEMENTS

- 1.28 As set out in Section 5, there will be no erosion of the physical, visual or perceptual gap between the settlements.
- 1.29 The character and appearance of the landscape beyond the Appeal Site and within the gap with Arborfield Cross will remain as farmland with farm buildings.

POLICY IRS2: RECOGNISE, RESPECT AND PRESERVE IDENTITY AND RURAL SETTING OF SETTLEMENTS

- 1.30 This policy primarily focusses on the manner in which the scheme is brought forward at the RMA stage. There is sufficient scope in the scheme proposals to deliver positive outcomes in respect of the materials, tree planting and achieving the objectives of the Village Design Statement.
- 1.31 The site is well contained and there will be no impacts on the views identified in the NHP.

POLICY IRS3: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND GREEN SPACES and POLICY AD3: HIGH QUALITY DEVELOPMENT WITH GENEROUS OPEN SPACE, PROPERLY LANDSCAPED

- 1.32 As set out in Section 2 of my evidence, the proposals respond positively to the local landscape character and delivery of new multifunctional Green Infrastructure.
- 1.33 Overall, the issue is not whether there is a change, development of greenfield locations inevitably leads to changes in landscape character and visual effects, a matter that is not an absolute impediment to granting consent and allocating land for new housing. From a landscape planning perspective, the key issue is whether the development results in undue³, ⁴ and significant effects.
- 1.34 In my professional opinion the proposals are consistent with the existing context, through their incorporation of accessible greenspace, inclusion of dwellings in a form consistent with the existing situation and response to the settlement pattern, grain and form that prevails in this location. They are neither excessive nor disproportionate.
- 1.35 Critically the proposals adhere to the Council's guidelines in respect of Green Infrastructure delivery (MDD Policy C003 explored in detail above in Section 3). Furthermore, the proposals conserve and enhance the landscape on the settlement edge through the delivery of:
- 1.35.1 New areas of accessible multifunctional green infrastructure.
- 1.35.2 Increased tree cover and softening the edge of the settlement, ensuring the longevity of the wooded components of the landscape.
- 1.35.3 Provision of accessible space and connectivity to bring community cohesion for the village and outlying development clusters.

³ Unwarranted or inappropriate because excessive or disproportionate (online dictionary definition). Disproportionate, or excessive (Oxford dictionary).

⁴ GLVIA, paragraph 5.40 (CD 18.01)

- 1.36 In conclusion, the landscape aspects of the third reason for refusal are unsubstantiated and provide no basis for refusing the appeal proposal.